

PLANNING YOUR VISIT

San Antonio Missions National Historical Park

How much time will I need to visit?

San Antonio Missions National Historical Park is open seven days a week from 9:00am-5:00pm. In order to truly explore and experience this unique park, you will need at least 3 hours. We recommend you spend 1 1/2 to 2 hours at the park Visitor Center and Mission San José. The other three missions each can be viewed in 30-40 minutes. The missions are located approximately two miles apart – a short drive but too far to walk.

General information?

The park Visitor Center is the place to go. Located at the entrance to Mission San José, the park staff on duty are there to answer your questions, provide maps and directions and offer suggestions on what to see and do. While there, it's a good idea to see the park's documentary film, *Gente de Razón*, which provides an overview on the history of the mission system in Texas and the people who lived there. The film is shown every 30 minutes and is available in Spanish upon request.

Parking?

Parking is available at all sites, even for tour buses. Reserved parking is available for handicapped visitors. Parking in unauthorized areas, such as bus loading zones or on the grass, can result in a parking ticket issued by a park ranger.

Shopping?

Mission San José is home to the **Spanish Colonial Bookstore**, located along the west wall of the mission compound, specializing in scholarly literature on the Spanish Colonial period and the southwestern U.S. They also have a good selection of books, postcards, videos, CDs and art prints on local San Antonio history and the Tejano culture. Operated by the Southwest Parks and Monuments Association, a portion of the profits is returned to the park to be used for educational and interpretive programs. There are smaller SPMA bookstores at Mission Concepción and the park Visitor Center.

Where can I eat?

Picnic tables are located throughout the park and can be used on a first-come, first-served basis. No food or drink is allowed inside the mission compounds. No grilling except in designated areas. Picnic facilities and playgrounds are also located at nearby Concepción Park, Espada Park and Mission County Park. Ask the ranger for directions.

Can I attend a church service?

Yes. Regular services are held on Sunday mornings at each of the missions. Ask the ranger for times and locations. The mission churches are still active parishes and sometimes are closed to visitors during funerals and weddings. Please respect parishioners' wishes by remaining outside until the service is through. The 12 noon mass at Mission San José is a "Mariachi Mass" which is very popular with local parishioners and the visiting public. If you want to attend, plan on arriving early since the doors close once the seats are filled.

Are there any trails?

The **Hike and Bike Trail** runs from just south of Mission Concepción to Mission Espada. The length is approximately 6 miles and winds down along the San Antonio River through Espada Park.

The **Yanaguana Nature Trail** at Mission San Juan is an accessible hiking trail covering a loop of 3/10 of a mile providing a view of the lush vegetation and wildlife along the river. A trail guide is available at the mission.

What other unique places can we visit?

The missions were once dependent on an acequia system – an extensive system of irrigation ditches that provided water to the surrounding farm lands. These gravity-flow ditches received water diverted by a dam. The **Espada Dam** is located just south on Mission San José in Espada Park. Further down the road is the **Espada Aqueduct** - the oldest, still functioning, Spanish-Colonial aqueduct in the U.S. that carries water over Piedras Creek by means of a bridge. There is no ranger station or restrooms at these sites, but they are definitely worth a look.

First Aid?

Many visitors have trouble with the heat and strong sun in south Texas. Remember to wear a hat and drink lots of water. Watch out for fire ants (they bite), and do not leave your pet in your vehicle unattended. (Pets are allowed in the park on a leash). If you need assistance, contact a Park Ranger. In an emergency, call **911**.